



# A MEDIA CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN

## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

A staggering number of young people are putting their health in jeopardy by engaging in behaviors with serious short- and long-term consequences. According to CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBS), only 27% of children in the United States attend physical education classes daily—down from 42% in just the past 9 years. Decreasing physical activity, coupled with unhealthful eating, has resulted in a doubling of the percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight over the past 20 years. Emerging trends of type 2 diabetes in youth may be one of the first consequences of the epidemic of obesity in youth. Tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use remain high, as are the rates of teenage depression and suicide. Every year, almost 1 million adolescents become pregnant, and approximately 3 million become infected with a sexually transmitted disease. Given the implications of physical inactivity and other unhealthy, risky behaviors, efforts to improve adolescent well-being must address these behaviors.

## WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC launched the youth media campaign in late spring 2002. The campaign, branded as “VERB. It’s what you do,” uses the best principles of marketing and communication strategies to promote healthy lifestyles and displace unhealthy, risky behaviors among America’s youth. Specifically, the goal of the campaign is to increase positive activity, including pro-social and physical activities among “tweens” (ages 9 - 13) through media, public and private sector partnerships, and community efforts with the support and involvement of parents and adult and teen role models. Our one-year goals for awareness of this campaign—an all-important measurement for a brand new idea—were achieved in less than 5 months. Fully 93% of young people ages 9-13 have seen or touched the campaign an average of almost 30 times. Additionally, tracking studies have shown that the target audience understands the messages being conveyed and view the campaign as fun and cool. Millions of “tweens” have acted on the messages of the campaign by participating in VERB events, joining a VERB-sponsored contest, or visiting the website, “[verbnow.com](http://verbnow.com).”

## WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Today’s young people are a generation with high rates of media consumption including television, radio, music, print and Internet use. These media sources offer a tremendous opportunity to market healthy behaviors to young people. The youth media campaign has been planned as a five-year effort and will continue to involve young people in all aspects of planning and implementation of fresh, new ideas to keep the campaign relevant for young audiences. The on-going evaluation of the campaign also will continue to inform CDC of the effectiveness of the campaign, and its impact on the lives of young people.

*For information on this and other CDC programs, visit [www.cdc.gov/programs](http://www.cdc.gov/programs).*

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